



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Summary Meeting Minutes
May 18th, 2010**

I. Call to Order & Introductions: Bill Gray, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Bill asked for all present to please stand for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged in and to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Approval of Minutes: Bill Gray, Chair, made the following changes to the April Meeting Summary Minutes: Greg Hamilton is not a Commissioner, but an Active Participant; Jack Hewitt, not Jackie Ogg, met with Reemberto Rodriguez, Director, Silver Spring Regional Center. Rich Fales, Commissioner, moved to approve the April Meeting Summary Minutes with necessary corrections. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the April Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved with the corrections. Approved minutes will be online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Issue of Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury ~ Dr. Lolita T. O'Donnell, PhD, RN, Deputy Director, Clearinghouse, Outreach & Advocacy Directorate Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health (PH) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Dr. Lolita O'Donnell gave an overview of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE). It is one of the newest organizations within the Department of Defense (DoD) and was created in response to an article featured in the Washington Post in February of 2007 that depicted the deplorable health care available at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. DCoE works in close partnership with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and leads a national and international collaborative network of other government organizations, military and civilian agencies, community leaders, advocacy groups, clinical experts and academic institutions in helping service members with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health (PH) issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. DCoE's purpose is to assess, validate, oversee and facilitate the implementation of programs that meet the intent of policy and provide service members with resources related to resilience, recovery, and reintegration for PH and TBI. Its core messages are that service members and families are not alone, and that treatment works. DCoE has several directorates including Clearinghouse, Advocacy and Outreach, and Research, Quality Assurance, Program Evaluation and Surveillance Directorate.

DCoE serves active duty, guard and reserve service members, veterans, families, military leaders, healthcare providers, researchers, employers, caregivers, and chaplains. In 2009, DoD issued an instruction that from then on DoD civilians would be deployed alongside active duty service members. DCoE recognizes these individuals and offers them the same services as service members. They are reaching out to employers as well and are working closely with the Department of Labor (DOL), which recently launched a project titled "America's Heroes at Work" that addresses the employment challenges of returning Service Members living with TBI and/or PTSD. DCoE informs DOL of the needs of our service members and DOL provides assistance to service members as they prepare to re-enter the workforce.

DCE is driving a cultural transformation to create a proactive approach to operational psychological health that spans the continuum of accession to transition out of the service and will increase force readiness by strengthening individuals and units, assessing and treating physical, psychological, and spiritual concerns early, and providing support networks for success reintegration.

Dr. O'Donnell facilitated a call to the Outreach Call Center. Lorrie Knight-Major, Commissioner, asked questions relating to mental health services and medication for parents of injured service members.

Dr. O'Donnell discussed several DCE accomplishments and upcoming initiatives:

- The DCE Outreach Center is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Center provides confidential answers, tools, tips and resources about PH and TBI as well as resources close to where callers live. Center is staffed by health consultants and nurses with background expertise in PH and TBI. You can reach the Center at 1-866-966-1020 (Toll Free).
- The Real Warriors campaign addresses the stigma associated with seeking assistance for concerns related to PH and TBI. The campaign features a variety of strategies including outreach and partnerships, print materials, media outreach, an interactive Web site and social media. The campaign also features stories of real service members who have sought treatment and are continuing to maintain successful military or civilian careers. More information can be found online at www.realwarriors.net.
- Sesame Workshop has partnered with DoD to create the program *Talk, Listen, Connect: Deployments, Homecomings, Changes*, a bilingual (English and Spanish), multimedia outreach program designed to help support military families with children between the ages of 2 and 5 experiencing deployments, multiple deployments or when a parent returns home changed due to a combat related injury. They have also created a free 2-DVD kit featuring stories about deployment, multiple deployments, and changes. The kits are being distributed by Military OneSource and are available for download online. More info can be found online at www.sesameworkshop.org/initiatives/emotion/tlc.
- afterdeployment.org is an online mental wellness and behavioral health website addressing post-deployment issues for all service members, veterans, and military families. The website features a self-assessment, resources, tools, and fact sheets.
- inTransition Program assists service members receiving mental health services transition between health care system or providers. It was designed as a bridge of support for service members when relocating to another assignment, returning from deployment, and transitioning from active duty to reserve, reserve to active duty, or returning to civilian life.
- Social networking tools such as chats, blogs, and mobile phone applications. DoD is trying to adapt to today's service members and veterans as they are younger and are more computer literate. DCE is also developing Virtual Reality Therapy (VRT). Research has shown that VRT is effective in combating post-traumatic stress disorder.

Dr. O'Donnell opened the floor to questions.

Mauri Hamilton, Commissioner, asked how DCE is managing mental health care providers so they don't become burned out, and if those providers understand the needs of the military. Dr. O'Donnell explained that one of the interview criteria is for sensitivity towards the needs of the military. Orientations are given

as well. Most providers have military medical background from their education. DCoE connects with academic centers to ensure TBI, PH, and PTSD is included in their curriculum.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, asked if the research that DCoE does is shared with the civilian sector. Dr. O'Donnell said they do and that DCoE also holds a free scientific conference every year to discuss PH and TBI. This year's conference will be held December 7th and 8th. Last year's topic was on the impact of deployment on families and caregivers. Proceedings from the conference are available online: www.dcoe.health.mil/Training/PastConferences.aspx.

Roland Kauffman, Commissioner, commented that he was unimpressed with the information given to Lorrie during the Outreach Call Center call. He recommended that staff provide more resources and information. Jane McCarthy, Commissioner, suggested that staff provide crisis intervention. Rich Schiffauer, Commissioner, commented that he thought the information provided to Lorrie was good and that she was referred to the appropriate organization. Dr. O'Donnell explained that the Outreach Center is considered a "warm hand off" to the VA. They currently do not have the authority to offer crisis intervention. She will take the Commission's concerns back to DCoE's leadership.

Lorrie Knight-Major, Commissioner, suggested that DoD provide funding for mental health care for parents of injured soldiers. AARP reported in May, 2008 that half of severely injured returning soldiers are single and are moving in with their parents, many of whom have lost jobs, are retired, and/or have no health insurance. This is a population that is being overlooked. Dr. O'Donnell encouraged Commissioners to contact their local Congressmen and Senators about this issue.

Carl Bedell, Commissioner, asked how many calls the DCoE Call Center receives. Dr. O'Donnell said they receive an average of 400 calls a month.

Dr. O'Donnell thanked the Commission. She asked Commissioners to continue to help DCoE serve and help our service members and veterans with PH and TBI issues.

IV. Silver Spring Civic Building and Veterans Plaza ~ Reemberto Rodriguez, Director, Silver Spring Regional Services Center

Mr. Rodriguez reviewed some of the construction photos, which are available online at: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/DGS/DBDC/RegionalProjectPages/silverspring.asp.
www.silverspringdowntown.com

The second floor will house offices for the Department of Technology Services, Community Use of Public Facilities, and the Regional Center, as well as one conference room and one activity/community room. The main floor includes the Veterans Plaza, which is over half an acre and includes a skating rink and art work being designed by Toby Mendez, a Maryland sculptor who has produced over 20 public monuments including the Thurgood Marshall Portrait Bust located at BWI Airport and a Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Alexandria, VA. The art work will be of beautiful etched glass. The main floor will also have an indoor courtyard, additional meeting/community rooms, an art gallery, and one great room that sits up to 500 people, seats up to 300 people banquet style, and can be divided in two. The address of the building is 1 Veterans Place. There will be an opening of the Civic Building on July 8th, 2010. The County will wait until Veterans Day to hold an appropriate dedication of the plaza. Mr. Rodriguez will take the Commission's lead regarding major events and milestone dates most relevant to veterans. He hopes the Commission will meet in the Civic Building.

Mr. Rodriguez responded to some issues that were brought up at a prior meeting:

- **Space to be allocated to honor the County's commitment for a Veterans Counselor Office:** One of the second floor offices is a "swing office" to be used as a small conference room, which could be used by a VSO.
- **Veterans group meetings and events be given priority use and be charged the same discounted rate as the Boy Scouts:** Mr. Rodriguez understands that CVA meetings can be held at the Civic Building for no cost and Montgomery County Government sanctioned veteran functions would be given priority use. He asked for a list of dates so the building can be reserved. Pricing is another issue as the building was designed in a time of prosperity and is operating at a time of austerity. It is a challenge to recoup the cost for meetings that are not Montgomery County Government sanctioned. Pricing will be commensurate with other public facilities, but they will work with paying customers to minimize the costs.
- **Display cases to be located in the lobby:** Mr. Rodriguez understands that the CVA will be the curator of these cases. He will work with the CVA as to what should be included in the displays.
- **Military artwork be included within and throughout the building:** Mr. Rodriguez will work with the CVA as the types of artwork to be included within and throughout the building.
- **Appropriate number of flags on the building and around Veterans Plaza representing all military branches with night lighting so the flags don't need to come down at night.** The grounds are designed for the appropriate flags to fly in the Plaza. The design currently does not include additional flags. Pete Esker, Commissioner, added that the three flags included in the design are the United States, the State of Maryland, and Montgomery County Government. The additional flags could be brought in for July 4th, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and other military days. Greg Hamilton, Active Participant, has lobbied in the past to have the POW/MIA flag included in the Veterans Plaza.

V. Chair and Vice Chair Report:

The official Rockville Memorial Renaming Ceremony will be held on Friday, May 28th. Those wanting to attend need to RSVP by Friday, May 21st. Speakers include Richard Doerflinger, father of fallen hero Thomas Doerflinger who lost his life conducting combat operations during Operating Iraqi Freedom, and Robert Brudno, a former U.S. Navy officer. Brudno's brother, Air Force Capt. E. Alan Brudno, was a prisoner of war for 7 ½ years and committed suicide four months after returning home becoming the first of the 566 returned Vietnam POWs to die. The Ceremony invite needs to be distributed to other Vietnam veterans and gold star families.

VI. Project Updates: None.

VII. Updates / Motions for Commission Action: None.

VIII. Roundtable:

Ann Humphrey, Office of Rep. Chris Van Hollen, reported that Montgomery County has received 25 Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers for homeless veterans. Constituents have already requested to use them. She thanked the Commissioners for highlighting this issue and allowing Congressman Van Hollen to bring it to the attention of Eric Shinseki, Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs and Shawn Donovan, Secretary, Department of Housing and Urban Development. Ken Barnum, Outreach Worker for DC VA Medical Center, explained the application process. The DC VA Medical Center only needs three or four pieces of documentation from a homeless veteran to apply for a voucher. The DC Housing Authority can take up to six months to issue a voucher. The entire process can take up to a year depending on how long it takes the veteran to find housing. The 25 vouchers allocated for Montgomery County will be handled by the Montgomery County Housing Authority, lessening the process time to 2 to 3 months. Ken said that 235 vouchers have been allocated to the DC greater area. If Montgomery County identifies more homeless veterans, they will have to apply through the DC VA

Medical Center. He added that in the last two years, 10,000 vouchers have been allocated nationwide. The DC VA Medical Center would like to have acquired 400 or 500 vouchers as they have identified 400 veterans in the DC area. It is unknown if Montgomery County will receive another 25 vouchers next year as it is a Congressional issue. (Please note that since the meeting we have learned the value of the VASH vouchers being awarded to the State. **HUD announced the following Housing Authorities received awards of VASH vouchers – these are awards of Section 8 specifically for homeless vets – vets must apply through the Homeless or VASH Coordinator at the affiliated VA.)**

Housing Authority of Baltimore City	Baltimore	MD	Baltimore	75	\$722,475
Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) of Montgomery County	Kensington	MD	Washington, D.C.	25	\$329,928
Housing Authority of Prince Georges County	Largo	MD	Washington, D.C.	25	\$336,594

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, June 15th, 2010, from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, MD in the 1st Floor Tan Conference Room.

Respectively submitted,
 Carly Clem, OSC
 Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison